DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 389 816 UD 030 735

AUTHOR Schwartz, Wendy
TITLE Opportunity To Learn Standards: Their Impact on Urban Students. ERIC/CUE Digest Number 110.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, New York, N.Y.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-UD-95-7; ISSN-0889-8049
PUB DATE Dec 95
CONTRACT RR93002016
NOTE 3p.
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, Institute for Urban and Minority Education, Teachers College, Box 40, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027 (free).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Access to Education; Ancillary School Services; Criteria; Curriculum; Disadvantaged Youth; Educational Change; *Educational Environment; Elementary Secondary Education; *Equal Education; *Evaluation Methods; Financial Support; Minority Groups; Resource Allocation; *Standards; Time Factors (Learning); *Urban Education
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests; Hawkins Stafford Act 1988; *Opportunity to Learn

ABSTRACT

The concept of "opportunity to learn" (OTL) strategies was first introduced several decades ago and was defined by a narrow set of instructional components. Since then, many additional criteria have been incorporated into the OTL concept, some specifically to ensure an equal education for disadvantaged and minority students. The original purpose of OTL measures was simply to describe aspects of the education process. Since then, they have been used to indicate overall educational quality and the availability and use of educational resources. The Hawkins-Stafford Education Amendments of 1988 mandated the development of OTL indicators to measure the effectiveness of federally-funded educational programs. Evaluating a school's OTL can provide information about whether the school has adequate resources, uses them effectively, and provides equal educational access. Although school reform programs vary in their commitment to OTL standards, OTL strategies can be implemented fairly easily in the following areas: (1) access to courses; (2) curriculum; (3) time factors; (4) teacher competence; (5) school resources; (6) school environment and culture; and (7) ancillary services. (Contains 12 references.) (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON URBAN EDUCATION

DIGEST

Number 110, December 1995 EDO-UD-95-7 ISSN 0889 8049

ED 389 816

OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN STANDARDS: THEIR IMPACT ON URBAN STUDENTS

Common sense dictates that in order for students to achieve they must have appropriate opportunities to learn. The concept of "opportunity to learn" (OTL) strategies was first introduced several decades ago and was defined by a narrow set of instructional components. Since then, educators and policy makers have incorporated many additional criteria into the OTL concept, some specifically to ensure an equal education for disadvantaged and minority students.

Despite recent attention to OTL strategies, most schools do not view them as either standards to be met or as indicators of educational quality. In fact, a survey of school districts revealed that most do not collect data related to OTL, and some are not even aware of the concept (Stevens & Grymes, 1993).

Origins of OTL

OTL as a Measurement Tool

The original purpose of OTL measures, when introduced by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), was simply to describe aspects of the education process. To determine whether cross-national differences in students' mathematics achievement were caused by differences in students' learning experiences rather than in their ability to master the subject, IEA developed measures for quantifying the instruction that students had received in a subject prior to testing (McDonnell, 1995).

Since that time, as the positive impact of well-designed OTL strategies on student achievement became clearer, they have been used to indicate overall educational quality, and, more specifically, the availability and use of education resources. Further, comparing the wide OTL differences among schools in the U.S. and resulting differences in student achievement can demonstrate educational inequity (Guiton & Oakes, 1995). Thus, the Hawkins-Stafford Education Amendments of 1988 mandated the development of OTL indicators to measure the effectiveness of Federally-funded educational programs. The resulting report by the Special Study Panel on Education Indicators (SSPEI, 1991) included a range of measurable indicators that covered both classroom experience and the overall school environment.

OTL as a Set of Standards

Many education policy makers believe that setting OTL standards will help schools, particularly those in poor urban areas, appreciate their essentiality to the educational infrastructure and make developing them a priority. Therefore, drafters of the voluntary education standards included "school delivery" standards in their reports. In particular, the National Council on Education Standards and Testing (NCEST, 1992), commissioned by Congress to determine the feasibility of national standards and assessments, asserted that OTL standards are necessary to help close the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students. The following year, the Clinton Administration's Goals 2000: Educate America Act also called for the establishment of OTL standards.

UD030735

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

OTL as Policy

The willingness of policy makers to commit to OTL standards varies widely. Some believe that the school infrastructure should not be subject to Federal recommendations; a few even question whether it should be subject to state or local government policy. Also, some officials question the extent and effect of educational disadvantage experienced by urban and minority students (Elmore & Fuhrman, 1995).

OTL supporters, conversely, consider the establishment of standards to "represent a social contract between schools and the larger community" (McDonnell, 1995, p. 312), and some argue that students should not be held to any performance standards at all unless their schools meet stringent OTL standards. A group in favor of OTL strategies but opposed to legislating standards points out that the best way for states to enhance OTL is to give local agencies the resources and freedom to reform schools overall (Elmore & Fuhrman, 1995).

There are several practical impediments to instituting standards. The largest is their likely cost. Another is the threat of possible lawsuits arising from the position that a school has violated the OTL standards mandate.

OTL standards remain in the draft stage at the Federal level, and would be voluntary even if promulgated. Some states, however, such as New Jersey and Texas, have already legislated standards, though usually mandating nothing more specific than an "efficient" education. Lawsuits dealing with equitable distribution of education resources are wending their way through state courts, and may ultimately result in the refinement of the states' ambiguous language about student educational rights (O'Day & Smith, 1993). In addition, OTL standards may be instituted as the result of lawsuits dealing with school finance, student assessment, or unequal opportunity (McDonnell, 1995).

OTL as Assessment

Evaluating a school's OTL can provide information about whether the school has adequate resources, is deploying them effectively, and is providing equal educational access (Darling-Hammond, 1994). Comparing OTL evaluations across schools can help parents decide where to educate their children. OTL evaluation can also put data on student achievement into context, making it more comparable across student ethnicity and sex, as well as schools and school districts.

The Nature of OTL Strategies

Current general school reform programs use OTL strategies, since most strive to align all components of a student's educational experience in a way that maximizes learning (O'Day & Smith, 1993). In addition, new cognitive science research providing insights on how students learn, and research suggesting the impact of race, discrimination, and segregation on learning, indicate ways to teach students with different learning styles and various ethnicities most effectively (Baratz-Snowden, 1993). However, many schools either

do not consciously relate OTL strategies to student achievement or reject them as luxuries they cannot afford. Some strategies, however, can be implemented fairly easily.

Curriculum and Instruction

Access to Courses

All students should have access to high level courses that will allow them to meet performance and content standards and provide them with good career opportunities (Oakes, 1989; Smith & Day, 1993).

Curriculum

Curriculum should:

- meet the content standards for the subject,
- be logically integrated with other coursework,
- reflect the challenges of real life problems,
- present material in a context relevant to students, and
- be as free as possible from hidden bias (NCEST, 1992; SSPEI, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 1994).

Time

- Teachers should spend adequate time covering the content in class.
- Students should have time to learn content on their own.
- Schools should emphasize more important curricula by assigning more class time for it.
- Schools should provide students with time to do general academic work on the campus (Oakes, 1989).

Teacher Competence

Pre- and in-service teacher training should:

- lead to mastery of course content and techniques to teach it meaningfully, with particular attention to the material in the content standards, and
- include strategies for reaching diverse student populations and students with different learning styles (SSPEI, 1991; NCEST, 1992).

School Organization

Resources

- Schools should have enough physical space to accommodate all their students safely.
- Schools should have an adequate number of teachers and classrooms to ensure optimum class size.
- Students should have access to textbooks and educational facilities.
- Teachers should have the materials, time, private space, and support staff they need for lesson preparation and professional development.
- Schools should establish curricular priorities, ensure appropriate teacher assignments, and provide students with needed supports (Oakes, 1989; SSPEI, 1991).

Environment and Culture

- The school building should be clean, safe from hazards, and in good repair.
- The school culture should foster learning and demonstrate concern for students' well-being.
- Schools should promote respect for diversity and protect student populations from discrimination.
- Staff and students should be expected to behave respectfully toward each other, and feel protected from potential violence (SSPEI, 1991).

Ancillary Services

Schools and communities must take a comprehensive approach to student health and social service needs.

Strategies should include immunization; physical and mental health care services; protection from unsafe and violent environments; and substance abuse, sex, and pregnancy counseling.

Schools or communities should ensure that teachers, counselors, social workers, and other professionals work together to best meet students' needs and to deliver comprehensive services (Jackson, 1993; Berry, 1993).

Conclusion

Whether or not educational standards are instituted, the debate can serve to increase public awareness of the relationship between opportunity to learn strategies and achievement. If schools are encouraged to focus on their ability to promote learning, student performance will improve even in the absence of national or state standards.

— **Wendy Schwartz**

References

Baratz-Snowden, J. C. (1993, Summer). Opportunity to learn: Implications for professional development. *Journal of Negro Education, 62*(3), 311-324. (EJ 473 820)

Berry, G. L. (1993, Summer). Psychological services providers, the opportunity to learn and inner-city students: Beyond mere curricular reform. *Journal of Negro Education, 62*(3), 355-363. (EJ 473 823)

Darling-Hammond, L. (1994, August). National standards and assessments: Will they improve education. *American Journal of Education, 102*(4), 478-510. (EJ 492 309)

Elmore, R. F., & Fuhrman, S. H. (1995, Spring). Opportunity-to-learn standards and the state role in education. *Teachers College Record, 96*(3), 433-458.

Guiton, G., & Oakes, J. (1995, Fall). Opportunity to learn and conceptions of educational equality. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 17*(3), 323-336.

Jackson, S. F. (1993, Summer). Opportunity to learn: The health connection. *Journal of Negro Education, 62*(3), 377-393. (EJ 473 825)

McDonnell, L. M. (1995, Fall). Opportunity to learn as a research concept and policy instrument. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 17*(3), 305-322.

National Council on Education Standards and Testing. (1992). *Raising standards for American education. A report to Congress, the Secretary of Education, the National Education Goals Panel, and the American people.* Washington, DC: Author. (ED 338 721)

Oakes, J. (1989, Summer). What educational indicators? The case for assessing the school context. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 11*(2), 181-199. (EJ 409 730)

O'Day, J. A., & Smith, M. S. (1993). Systemic reform and educational opportunity. In S. H. Fuhrman (Ed.), *Designing coherent education policy: Improving the system.* San Francisco: Jossey Bass. (ED 359 626)

Special Study Panel on Education Indicators. (1991). *Education counts: An indicator system to monitor the Nation's educational health.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (ED 334 279)

Stevens, F. I., & Grymes, J. (1993). *Opportunity to learn: Issues of equity for poor and minority students.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (ED 356 306)

ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, Institute for Urban and Minority Education, Box 40, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027, (800) 601-4868. Erwin Flaxman, Director. Wendy Schwartz, Managing Editor.

This Digest was developed by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract. no. RR93002016. The opinions in this Digest do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of OERI or the Department of Education.